

Doing their part to help the James

By Mike Morell
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The James River Clean Up, a project began six years ago by a small group of dedicated local environmentalists, has just completed its fifth annual event.

"This would have been our sixth annual event," said project organizer Roger Nelson.

"Unfortunately, last year we were canceled by a hurricane coming through." Nelson said the first year there were about six people involved in the effort.

"This year we had about 45 people," he said.

He added that currently there are four organizations working on the project as well as many individuals, all under the umbrella of Friends of the James.

"We now have the Sierra Club, Keep Nelson Beautiful and most recently James River State Park in Buckingham County," he said. "Mike Neil, and his Rose of Nelson batteau crew have also participated for the past several years."

Each year the cleanup project area has extended from the state park to the James River Wildlife Management Area. Crews in canoes and kayaks launch from either the state park or the Wingina boat launch area and move along the river removing any debris and trash they can locate and get out.

"My husband Robert and I have worked on the cleanup since 2001," said Keep Nelson Beautiful member Susan McSwain. "It's pretty amazing what winds up in the river."

The day began at 8:30 a.m. with safety meetings at both Wingina and the state park. Participants who did not have their own boat were given canoes from the park's Dixon's Landing boat launch for free. The park also arranged a shuttle from Wingina and the wildlife management area and the park to get people and boats back to their launch locations.

While most of the volunteers were on the river, some were picking up trash along Virginia 56 and others were cooking and preparing food at the Wingina boat launch area for the workers. Each participant received a T-shirt and a chance to win items donated for a raffle. Participants came from as far away as Roanoke and Lexington.

Nelson, who had worked on other river cleanup projects in other parts of Virginia, plans to continue and expand the project each year.

"The James is a beautiful river," he said. "Together we plan to keep it that way."

Questions, comments, story ideas? Contact Mike Morell at mmorell@neweraprogress.com.